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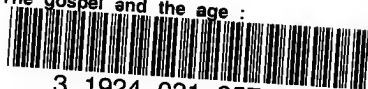
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PREFACE.

THE sermons contained in this volume were preached, as their title states, on special occasions. They were selected for publication not as possessing, for that reason, any special merit, but because they were the only ones the publication of which was possible for their author.

The preacher of what are called extempore sermons—that is to say, sermons not read from manuscript, but delivered from brief notes—cannot reproduce them in print unless they happen to have been taken down at the time by a reporter. Such reports can hardly ever be verbatim, and are for the most part more or less imperfect and inaccurate. The process of revising them and of supplying their omissions, with a view to publication, is not an easy one, even when attempted after the lapse of a few days—still less so after that of years; and its results are rarely quite satisfactory

either to the author or the reader. A sermon thus patched and mended has neither the freshness and point of the extempore nor the smoothness and sustained thought of the written composition. It is neither a religious speech, which the extempore sermon ought to be—nor a religious essay, which the written sermon ought to be; and it runs the risk of uniting the defects of both styles with the merits of neither. Such as it is, however, this method was the only one available for me, when, in compliance with many and repeated requests, I employed the enforced leisure of a long convalescence in preparing for the press those few sermons of mine which have been reported with sufficient accuracy to allow of the attempt to reproduce them in somewhat better form.

Their dates and occasions have been given in order to explain expressions and allusions in most of them which would otherwise have been unmeaning. Their title was chosen because, when put together, they seemed mainly pervaded by the thought—which should indeed never be absent from the mind of a preacher—of the antagonisms between the Gospel which he preaches and the spirit of the Age in which he lives, and by the desire to find, if possible, some reconcilements of

these, or, where this is not possible, some clearer conception of them and of the reasons for them.

Most deeply thankful shall I be if any word in these sermons shall have proved helpful, in this respect, to any earnest thinker or doubter. I would ask of such an one, if such there be, that he would, in return, give the preacher a place in his prayers, and that he would ask for him that he may be enabled more and more to realize in his heart and set forth in his life whatever of truth there may be in the thoughts he has thus endeavoured, however imperfectly, to convey to others.

BEACH HOUSE, WORTHING,

April 30th, 1884.

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THE SEEKER AFTER A SIGN AND THE
SEEKER AFTER WISDOM.

THE SEEKER AFTER A SIGN AND THE SEEKER AFTER WISDOM.

AN ORDINATION SERMON, PREACHED AT WHITEHALL CHAPEL, LONDON,
DEC. 23, 1860.

“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

1 COR. i. 22—24.

TWO facts are here recorded by St. Paul as the result of his experience as a preacher of the Gospel. First, that this Gospel provoked hostility wherever it was preached; that it was rejected, not by men of one nation or of one creed alone, but by men of all nations and of all creeds. No two races, no two types of the human mind, could have been more widely different, more directly the opposite of each other, than the Jew and the Greek. The very fact that the Gospel was displeasing to the one might therefore have led us to expect that it would be sure to please the other. And yet Jews and Greeks, who agreed in nothing else, agreed in rejecting Christ. “He was to the Jews a stumblingblock, and to the Greeks foolishness.” Nevertheless, St. Paul tells us, in the second place, this Gospel possessed just those very qualities, for the seeming want of which Jew and Greek refused to receive it. The Jew rejected it for its seeming want of power; he demanded “a sign,” an evidence of its Divine origin, greater than any it had ever given. The Greek rejected it for

its seeming want of wisdom ; and yet Christ crucified was “to the called, both Jew and Greek,” both wisdom and power ; nay, the perfection of wisdom and power. “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

Christ, then, was, according to the experience of Paul, just what the Prophets had foretold He should be ; at once the “desire of all nations,” and the “despised and rejected of men.” “The messenger of the Covenant, in whom they should delight” and yet “He in whom they should see no beauty that they should desire Him. He was at once all that men most needed and all that they most disliked.

And it is in the union of these two facts that we have the strongest proof that Christ crucified is really God’s gift to man—the Father’s provision for the wants of His suffering children ; for it shows us that Christ is all that man wants, and yet that the human mind could never have imagined a Christ. If the Gospel had really been deficient in any one element of human happiness, if it left the need of any part of man’s nature unsatisfied, then it could not have been, what it claims to be, God’s good news—God’s revelation of blessing to all men. But, on the other hand, if this Gospel, which is so wonderfully adapted to our nature, which does so completely satisfy all our wants, had been universally and at once received by all men, then it might have been said, This Christ the Saviour is but a thought of the human mind ; He is only the dream of a suffering humanity picturing to itself a deliverer from all its woes—the mirage of the human soul in its fever-thirst for happiness. Now, against this notion stands the fact, that, so far from the idea of a Christ being the natural product of the human mind, it was just what the mind of man naturally disliked and rejected. Christ crucified was no Jewish legend ; He was “to the Jews a stumbling-block.” Christ crucified was no Greek myth ; “He was

to the Greeks foolishness.” Most precious, then, amongst the evidences of our faith, is this record of the twofold experience of its greatest missionary, proving, as it does, at once the fitness of the Gospel for man’s need and yet the odiousness of the Gospel to man’s prejudices, and going, therefore, far towards proving that the Christ of the Gospel is, indeed, nothing less than the “wisdom and the power of God.”

But for those who inherit Paul’s mission, for all preachers of the Gospel, these words are more than an evidence; they are a prophecy. His experience is that of all who preach Christ crucified. They find, in every age, that the Gospel contains all that the age requires and yet that this is just what that age complains the Gospel does not supply. They find that the desire of the generation in which they live, that thing, be it what it may, for which men are crying out most earnestly, is just that very thing which the Gospel, and the Gospel alone, can give. So much so that, in fact, the complaint of each age against the Gospel will always indicate, unerringly, that very aspect of it which most needs to be brought out in the preaching of it. Nay, more; not only is the experience of St. Paul thus broadly and generally fulfilled in that of all preachers of Christianity, but it is repeated in all its circumstances and details. All true preachers of it encounter the very same opposition that he did, arising from the same causes. For the opposition which the Gospel met with in St. Paul’s day was not of that day alone. The Jew and the Greek, the seeker after the sign and the seeker after wisdom, exist always. Still, wherever the Gospel is preached, must the preacher expect to hear from each of these the same demand that Paul heard; still must he find, with Paul, Christ crucified a stumblingblock to the one and foolishness to the other. For these two—the seeker

after the sign and the seeker after wisdom—the man who would rest all religion, all philosophy, all social polity, upon authority alone, and the man who would rest them all upon reason alone—this Jew, with his reverence for power, his love of custom and tradition—which are the power of the past—his tendency to rest always in outward law and form—the power of the present—his distaste for all philosophical speculation, his impatience of novelty, his dread of change—leaning always to the side of despotism in society and of superstition in religion,—and, on the other hand, this Greek, with his subtle and restless intellect, his taste for speculation, his want of reverence for the past, his desire of change, his love of novelty, his leaning towards licence in society and scepticism in religion; what are they—these two—but the representatives of those two opposite types of mind which divide and always have divided, all mankind? Do we not find them wherever man is found, appearing at every great crisis, whether in religion, or philosophy, or politics, in broadly-marked contrast, and shaping, by their antagonistic influences, the history of every sect, and school, and state? Must we not expect, therefore, to trace the effects of these opposing influences, these two great currents of the human mind, upon Christianity, as upon all else? Must we not expect to find them, as Paul found them, displaying themselves, now in the denial, now in the corruption and the perversion of the faith; knowing as we do, that whatever tendencies induce a man, in the first instance, to reject any truth, will, after he has received it, tempt him to pervert it?

If we would therefore be truly the successors of the great Apostle; if we would prove ourselves, like him, able ministers of the New Testament—able at once to preach and to preserve the faith once delivered to the saints; able at

once to feed and to guard the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made us overseers; if we would deal as wisely, as lovingly, as tenderly, as successfully, with those whose souls we desire to win for Christ, as he did, we must understand why it was that the Jew and the Greek alike refused to believe him, and how it was that he dealt with each of them. We must study carefully this account which he gives of the Gospel in its encounter with the wants and the requirements, the desires and the prejudices of his age.

Let us consider, then, first, *What it was that Jew and Greek demanded of Christ*; secondly, *How the Gospel, though refusing to give it in the form in which they asked for it, really gave the very thing they each desired?*

I. And, first; What was the demand of the Jew? He "required a sign." We know from the Gospels what this "sign" was; it was one particular miracle selected by the Jews as the test of our Lord's claims; "the sign from heaven," or "the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens," which they so repeatedly asked for. The miracles of Christ did not sufficiently prove His mission for the Jew, who knew that there might be false miracles as well as true,—nay, that false teachers might work real miracles.* However great, therefore, or however numerous the miracles Christ wrought, they still left the question undecided whether He was or was not the Messiah. The Jews demanded, therefore, such a miracle as would leave no room for doubt; some sign from heaven, some glory or wonder in the sky, wrought manifestly and undoubtedly by God Himself, which should compel all who saw it to believe. This was that "sign" which they were always demanding of Christ, and it

* Deut. xiii. 1—3.

was that sign which our Lord would never give.* Never would he grant them such a display of Divine power as should leave no need for attending to all the other proofs of His mission; all the moral evidence of His spotless life and of His words of wisdom; all the scriptural evidence from the Law and the Prophets which testified of Him. And because He would not do this—because He would never force them to believe in spite of themselves, because He would never give them such a demonstration of His mission as would relieve them from the difficulty and responsibility of judging for themselves and the necessity of bringing themselves into a fit condition for judging impartially—they refused to believe in Him. If He would only have complied with their requirements, if—divesting Himself of all those conditions of humiliation and weakness which offended their prejudices and provoked their unbelief—He had appeared in all the overwhelming glory of His divinity, silencing at once all doubt by the manifestation of power and of power alone, they would have received Him; but because He would not do this they rejected Him. A Christ appearing in glory in the heavens, Him they would receive; a Jesus walking in lowly goodness on the earth, dying on a cross from which He will not descend at their bidding even to win their belief, Him they will have none of. “Christ crucified is a stumblingblock to the Jew.”

Exactly opposite to the demand of the Jew was that of the Greek. He asked for no sign, he cared nothing for the supernatural, he had ceased to believe in it. He believed only in nature; he sought only for wisdom to understand himself and the world in which he lived; he asked from Christ only light on those problems in

* Matt. xii. 38. Mark viii. 11, 12.

external nature, or in himself, on which his subtle mind was ever working. He wanted a perfect philosophy, or, at least, a perfect morality, which could justify itself to his intellect by solving all those difficulties which beset all other philosophies and all other systems of morals. Could Christianity do this? Could it tell him what was mind, and how it differed from matter? Could it tell him whether he was governed by fate or by free-will? Could it tell him whence came evil? If it could, he was willing to listen to it and to believe all that it could prove. But then for such teaching there was no need of miracles any more than there was for the teaching of geometry. All that was true in it he would receive on its own evidence, and he would receive nothing that did not so prove itself to be true.

This Gospel, then, displeased the Greek just because it would not give him what he wanted, and because it offered him exactly what he did not want. It left unsolved those mysteries which he was always trying to solve, while it required him to accept miraculous legends which he despised. To the eager, ambitious questionings of that daring intellect that would fain scale Heaven itself in its search after knowledge and demand from Him who sits upon its throne reason for all His deeds and proof for all His words, the Gospel gave no answer. It revealed still the same horizon of impenetrable cloud that bounds the view of all the dwellers upon earth, though it declared that beyond that veil of cloud there shines the light to which no man can approach. Or, if it shed at all a clearer light upon any of those things he had desired to know, it did so but as the telescope resolves for the astronomer some dim nebulous mystery of the heavens only by bringing at the same time some remoter and hitherto unseen mystery into view. It told him, if not of the origin,

at least of the end of evil; but it did so by revealing to him the mystery of the Atonement by which he was redeemed from evil. It told him that man was not the slave of Fate; but it did so by revealing to him the mystery of the Incarnate Christ, his living Lord and Master. In one word, it showed him POWER—the power of Christ the Saviour, supernatural, miraculous, mysterious, divine; and to this power it demanded his submission; and, because it did this, he would have none of it. A Jesus, a wise and pure teacher of a pure system of morals, he might receive; but a Christ incarnate, redeeming, atoning, rising from the dead, a supernatural being with supernatural claims to his obedience, this was no better than the old fables of his own mythology which he had long outgrown! This was “foolishness” to him.

Thus we see that the Jew rejected the Gospel of Christ because it had not enough of the supernatural; the Greek, because it had too much: the Jew, because it did not give the miraculous evidence he demanded; the Greek, because it had any miracles at all: the Jew, because it did not compel him to believe; the Greek, because it required him to do so: or, in the words of our text, the Jew, because it was not all power; the Greek, because it was not all wisdom.

But so long as the Apostles were faithful to their mission they never could have preached the Gospel so as to satisfy the demand of either Jew or Greek. For they were sent into the world not to propound dogmas nor to teach a philosophy, but to relate a history. They were sent to testify to what they had “seen and heard and their hands had handled, of the word of life;” sent to be witnesses to the facts of the birth, life, work, words, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. These they were to tell to men; and so long as they told these facts

fully and faithfully, they must necessarily have offended both the seeker after the sign and the seeker after wisdom. For their story describes a Christ neither altogether supernatural, as the Jew required Him to be, nor yet altogether natural, as the Greek required Him to be; but a Christ who is both. Perfect man in all the reality of His human nature; perfect God in all the mystery of His Divine essence. The story reveals for the Jew a sign and a wonder *from* heaven, but not *in* it; not flashing out from the sky in awful majesty, but dwelling on the earth in lowly and loving goodness. It is a Galilean carpenter, who stills the sea and wakes the dead. It is round the cross of a condemned criminal that the heavens grow dark, and the earth quakes; and from this cross Christ will not descend to win men's belief. The Gospel is the story of a Christ *crucified*. On the other hand, it reveals for the Greek a human teacher speaking words of wisdom such as never man spoke before; but it bids him believe this Man to be the great power of God. It shows him Jesus on earth; but shows him, too, heaven opened and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. It shows him a cross and a grave; but it bids him say at the foot of that cross, with the Gentile witness who stood there, "Truly this man is the Son of God:" it bids him look into that grave spoiled of its tenant, and worship Him who rose from it.

This Gospel then, this simple narrative of the life and death of Christ, is that which makes it impossible for the preacher of it, so long as he is faithful to his mission, to accommodate Christianity to the demands of his age. It is the *history* of Christ crucified which opposes ever an insuperable resistance to every attempt to explain the *doctrine* of Christ crucified into a philosophy, or to darken it into a superstition; and it is this history there-

fore which made, and will ever make, the Gospel "a stumblingblock" to the superstitious seeker after a sign, and "foolishness" to the philosophical seeker after wisdom.

And if the Apostles had attempted to satisfy the Jew or the Greek—if they had accommodated the Gospel to the demand of the one by adding to it the amount of miracle he asked for, or to that of the other by divesting it of all its supernatural character—then their Gospel would not have been worth the preaching; it would have ceased to be the Gospel; God's good news for man. For what is the good news of the Gospel? It is salvation from sin; it is the deliverance of man from the evil that is in him and has become a part of him. And what is this evil? It is enmity to God. The curse of the fallen man is that he does not love God; does not believe that God loves him, that He is the Father who in all His commands only wills his happiness. Man does not believe this. He distrusts God. Now, until this distrust and dislike of God is removed, man is not and cannot be saved; any change wrought on him, short of this, is not a saving change. It would not suffice, for instance, to place him in circumstances in which his disobedience, which is only the expression of his distrust, should be restrained by terror; nor again, to give him such clear knowledge that his unbelief, which is only another expression of distrust, should have no provocation; for in such a case the nature of the man would remain still unchanged, the unbelief and the disobedience would be repressed, not eradicated. Remove the terror that enforces his submission; give any new revelation which passes beyond the bounds of his knowledge, and the distrust breaks out again at once in disobedience or unbelief. The revelation of God, then, to man, which is to save him, must not be one which makes

it impossible for him to doubt or disobey ; it must rather be one which makes it possible for him to believe and to obey ; one which, leaving room for doubt and disobedience, yet enables him to overcome doubt and to subdue disobedience ; one which enables him to wrestle with, to conquer, to slay the evil in him, not one which merely lulls that evil to sleep. It must be, in short, a revelation which brings him face to face with his first temptation, and bids him hear again the question, "Hath God said?" yet which does not force him, but only helps him, enables him, if he *will* do so, to say, "Yea, God hath said, and I will trust Him and obey."

Let us suppose, for instance, that the Jew had obtained his wish, and that the sign of the Son of Man had appeared in the heavens, in all the awful splendour of His Divine Majesty. There would certainly have been no room for doubt in the mind of those who saw that sign ; sore afraid, they would have owned the dreadful power of a present God : but neither would there have been room for faith or love. There could have been no possibility of that free play of all the spiritual faculties, that contest of opposing forces, that strife of faith and hope and holiness, with doubt and fear and sin, by which the spirit-life in man grows and strengthens. No change would have passed on the spirit of the Jew ; he would not have loved or trusted God one whit the more for all the glory or the terror of the sign that displayed His power. We know this, because we know that there will come a day when the dream of the Jew will be realised, when "the sign of the Son of Man shall be seen in the heavens in power and great glory ;" and yet those who see it shall not be moved to love or trust : they will "cry to the rocks to fall on them, and the mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb." No ! power may compel assent,

but never can create trust. "The devils believe and tremble."

Again, suppose that the Greek had had his wish, that all miracle and mystery had vanished from the Gospel, and that it had become a mere moral philosophy; there would have been no room for doubt here certainly, but as surely no room for faith, no discipline of the heart, no training of the spirit, no moral progress. The Gospel would have been a philosophy, like any other; showing him what he ought to be, but giving him no power to become that thing it described. He would have had no more difficulty, it is true, in receiving it than in receiving the truths of mathematics, and it would have done him just as much good as mathematics; it might have added to his knowledge, might have sharpened his intellect, or elevated his fancy, or refined his taste, but it never could have changed his heart. It would have given him wisdom, the "wisdom of this world which comes to nought," just because it is of this world, beginning and ending with this life to which it belongs; but giving him no knowledge of, bringing him no help from, the higher and the diviner life without which he perishes. "Plentifully declaring" to him, in all its wise saws and moral axioms, "the thing that is;" telling him that "virtue alone is happiness," and that "vice is unworthy of man;" bidding him "cease to do evil, and learn to do well:" but only omitting to tell him *how* he is to cease to do evil, and *where* he is to get the power to do well; such wisdom as this it would have given him. But it could never have given him that "wisdom of God" which, because it is from God, *does* reveal to man the mystery of a higher life—the power of the world to come—which *does* tell him how he may obtain those things beyond this life "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the

heart of man to conceive;" but which—because it must be received, not by the intellect, but by the spirit of man, revealed to it by the Spirit of God in words which that Spirit teacheth—is foolishness to that "natural man which receiveth not the things of God."

Thus we see, that, widely different as the demands of the Jew and the Greek seemed at first, they were really asking one and the same thing; they were asking for an *unspiritual religion*; a revelation that should not deal with the heart at all in the way of trial or discipline, which would spare them the great trial of being called on to trust and to love, in spite of doubt and difficulty. What they sought for, in one word, was knowledge without belief. The Jew demanded a demonstration of God to his senses; the Greek demanded a demonstration of God to his intellect. The Jew required a revelation that should compel assent; the Greek required one that should give no occasion for doubt. Both demanded a religion without faith, both asked to see, both refused to believe in, an invisible God, and, therefore, both rejected a crucified Christ.

II. We have seen, then, what the Jew and the Greek demanded of the Gospel, and why the Gospel refused it. We have to see, in the next place, that the Gospel really gives in another form just what they demanded. Their demand was certainty; the certainty of knowledge. Let us see if the Gospel gives this.

The Gospel reveals Christ crucified; that is to say, it reveals to us, invites us to trust in, a person. Now, there is this difference between assent to a fact or a proposition and trust in a person; that in the one case perfect knowledge is absolutely necessary, in the other it is not. I must know the whole of an alleged fact before I can believe it; I must understand the whole of a proposition before

I can assent to it. But in the case of a person knowledge may be imperfect, and yet it may be enough to warrant the most implicit trust. I may know the being in whom I trust so far that I may feel assured he is utterly incapable of deceiving me; I may find in his teaching such wisdom and beauty, such knowledge of me and my wants, I may find in all his conduct such tender love and care for me, that I would sooner die than doubt him. And yet there may be much concerning him of which I may be ignorant; much of his previous history may be unknown to me; many things he says I may not understand; all his purposes I cannot fathom; and yet I trust him with my whole heart. Thus, you see, there may be perfect trust, and yet imperfect knowledge; such, for instance, as that of the child who trusts his parent implicitly but understands him imperfectly, who trusts, not because he knows, but in order that he may know; whose belief is, in fact, the necessary condition of all his knowledge.

But then, be it observed, this trust of mine will depend entirely upon my moral condition; will depend, that is to say, upon whether I am like or unlike the being I am asked to trust in. If I am unjust, untrue, unloving, I cannot believe in his truth and love; I cannot so much as imagine them, or understand them when I see them; I shall be jealous, suspicious, distrustful, hostile: and, on the other hand, it will be only in proportion as I am like him, only so far as I have in me some truth and righteousness and love, that I shall trust him. And thus my acquaintance with such a man will be at once a moral test and a moral discipline. It will always depend upon my own will and my own life how far I shall understand him and trust in him.

And is not this just the test and the discipline to which the Gospel submits us? It reveals an object for our

trust—Christ, the righteous man, holy, harmless, undefiled, tender and compassionate, loving and faithful even unto death ; Christ the all-powerful Son of God, mighty to save. And we are bid to trust in Him, to believe that He can save us ; to believe Him when He says that He has come from God His Father, to seek and to save us, the lost and the perishing ; to trust Him when He tells us that He is as powerful as He is good, as able as He is willing to save us ; to hearken to Him when He calls us to rise up and leave all for His sake ; to obey Him, as, calling to us from the cross on which He hangs a sacrifice for us, He bids us take up our cross and follow Him, and promises us that in the might of that cross we shall overcome the world, even as He has overcome it. And the trial is, will we trust in Him ? The discipline is, to learn to trust in Him. He will not dispense with that trial and that discipline by forcing us to believe or to obey in spite of ourselves. He will, indeed, make it reasonable that we should believe. As He comes to be the restorer of the life of our spirits, so will He, in token of this, be the restorer and the giver of life in all the lower domains of life. As He comes to give us a diviner and a truer wisdom, so will He speak words of heavenly wisdom. But neither His wisdom nor His miracles are such as to divert our attention from Himself, His goodness, His holiness, His truth. “Believe me,” He still says, rather than My works. And therefore it is that He veils His glory in weakness and hides His wisdom in parables and mingles with His gracious words hard sayings that offend ; so that those who trust Him not may reject the sign and those who love Him not may deny the wisdom : while those, and those alone, who love and trust Him, will reply to every doubt, to every temptation to desert Him,—“To whom shall we go ? ” “He, and He alone, has the words

of eternal life." And thus He is ever a test and a trial to all who behold Him. Those who *will* see Him, as He is, may; those who will not, who wish not to see him, shall not. But for those who do there is a daily growth in trust and love, an ever-increasing assurance that He is the wisdom and power of God; "For to as many as believe on Him to them giveth He POWER to become sons of God."

And thus the Gospel does at last give us that very certainty of knowledge which it seems at first to refuse. Christ crucified, received into the heart, works there the very sign; gives the very wisdom that the Jew demanded and the Greek sought for in vain. He works in the heart of man a greater, a more convincing miracle than any recorded in the Gospel. He wakes the dead soul to life, feeds it with heavenly food, casts out the unclean spirits that have made it their abode, and enters in and dwells there, stilling the war of its wild elements, rebuking the winds and waves of its stormy passions into peace; and he who feels himself the subject of this miracle, sees in his soul the true sign of the Son of Man, knows, with the same absolute certainty that he knows any object presented to his senses, that Christ in him is "the power of God." Again; in the soul of the believer, He sheds abroad that light of heavenly wisdom by which it sees God and itself, lighting up all the mysteries of the word, shining down into the depths of man's spiritual being, showing there "the wondrous works of the Lord," making him wise with that unction from the Holy One, by which he knows all things; and he who has this light in his soul sees, as plainly as he can see any fact in nature, any demonstration of science, that Christ in him is "the wisdom of God." And yet in this inward assurance, this experimental evidence of the Gospel, there is no fanaticism, no mysticism, no exclusive appeal to an inward light, dis-

pensing with all other sources of knowledge. The Gospel is still the Gospel of Christ crucified, still links itself with real and objective fact. It is the Christ of history, the Christ whose deeds and words we know, the Christ who instituted the church and the sacraments, who is, in the soul, wisdom and power. For the Gospel of Christ, because it is to save the whole man, addresses itself to all the man; not to the senses alone, though it has power as its evidence for the senses; not to the intellect alone, though it has wisdom as its evidence for the intellect; not to the emotions alone, though it speaks to the heart: but to all three, and all three together. Christianity is not a merely intellectual, nor yet a merely sensuous, nor yet a merely intuitional religion; but it is all these, and all of them together. And thus we see how the Gospel does give what men ask, only not *as* they ask. They desire certainty, the certainty of *knowledge*; it gives the certainty of *trust*. They ask for knowledge without faith, and the result is, they obtain neither knowledge nor faith; the Gospel requires faith in order to knowledge, and those who receive it gain knowledge as the reward of faith. "They *know* in whom they have believed, and are persuaded that He is able to keep that which they have intrusted to Him;" because He has been, because He is becoming for them, more and more in their own soul's experience, "Christ the wisdom of God, and the power of God,"—Christ in them "the hope of glory."

III. And now that we have seen what was the demand of the Jew and the Greek in Paul's day, is it not clear that the Jew and the Greek exist still, have always existed; that the Gospel, then and now and always, has to encounter the demand of those who ask for the sign or who seek after wisdom? On the one hand, do we not see the

craving for the sign—for the display, that is, of supernatural power, crushing and silencing all doubt—resulting in all superstitious corruptions of Christianity? For what is superstition, but an appeal from wisdom to power, an effort to silence the reason by the terrors of the senses? Once the seeker after the sign believes that he beholds it, is it not obvious that, by the very conditions he has imposed upon himself, he has lost all right to ask for further proof, or to question the utterances of the oracle he has himself chosen? If the Jews were prepared to believe in Christ, in spite of all that seemed to them unscriptural in His teaching, provided only He gave them the sign they demanded, then it is clear, that if ever any one should come who would give, or seem to give them this sign, or any other which they might hold to be sufficient to demonstrate his mission, they would implicitly believe him, whatever the character of his teaching might be. The very idea of doubting or denying any word of such a teacher would be blasphemy; and the greater the difficulty, the greater would be the merit in believing. Thus, the demand for the sign and the sign alone, as the sole reason for belief, leaves the seeker after it liable to be deceived by every false teacher who can only persuade him that he possesses it; makes him the slave of him, whoever he may be, who seems to hold the talisman that he has bound himself to obey. It was so with the Jew. The nation that rejected and crucified the true Christ, believed in and shed its blood for more than one false Christ. Thus has it ever been with all the seekers after the sign. The demand for a religion which shall dispense with the exercise of reason and the discipline of thought, is ever punished by belief in a religion which outrages all reason and, at last, silences all thought. Superstition is still the Nemesis, not of faith, but of unbelief. And every such superstition

necessarily grows always grosser and darker as it grows older. For the desire of the teacher for power, combining with the desire of the taught for certainty, must tend always to efforts at making the SIGN, which is to secure both, still more awful and convincing, by still greater and more awful attestations. A fresh miracle must still be provided to silence each fresh heresy, a new prodigy to confirm each new dogma. And thus stranger and still stranger legend, falser and still falser doctrine, must multiply more and more to meet the increasing demands of the system upon the credulity of its followers, until, at last, it resembles some great tropical forest, all choked up with the rank luxuriance of its own undergrowth, the old pathways obliterated, the shrines where men once prayed, the homes where they dwelt, concealed and mouldering in the dark embrace of its tangled parasites. What else but this has been the whole history of Romanism, with all its superstitions and all its false signs and wonders to attest them? What is it all but the result, the necessary result, of an attempt to give men the infallible certainty they crave, in the shape of a living and speaking infallible judge, silencing all doubt, terminating all controversy by its decisions and enforcing its authority by repeated miracles? What is all the long and ever-lengthening chain of her legends, from its first pious fraud to its last and newest prodigy? What are they all, but one constant and increasing effort to make more and more clearly visible the ever-waning sign, to recover the ever-wavering allegiance of men by fresh appeals from the obstinate questionings of the intellect to the terrors of the senses? And what is that strange charm and witchery of this system, by which it has held in subjection in times past, by which it bows to subjection in our own day, so many a noble intellect, in spite of all the gross-

ness of its errors and incredibleness of its superstitions? Is it not this, that, proclaiming the revelation of the sign, it professes to give that *certainly*, that absolute freedom from all doubt in matters of faith, which men so earnestly desire? Is it not that, to minds worn out with the strife of controversy and the agony of doubt, it offers repose from all the painful effort at deciding for themselves questions for which the human intellect can never find a satisfactory solution? To souls exhausted with the feverish anxieties of freedom, it offers the rest of despotism. To the weary and heavy laden, borne down with the burden of their own doubts and difficulties, Rome speaks ever, in cruel and misleading parody, those comfortable words of Christ, "Come unto me, and find rest for your souls." Still does she stand, the false representative of Christ, by the well-side where come those who thirst for truth, and telling them ever that they "have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep," bids them ask of her, and she will give them water, which if they drink of "they shall never thirst again." Who is there among us who has thought earnestly and deeply on those vexed questions that are trying men's souls in this day of doubt and controversy, when all creeds are challenged, all opinions disputed, when we are driven to search ever deeper and deeper for the foundation of all our faith and the ground of all our hope, who has not felt the terrible fascination of this temptation to repose? Who has not listened with a longing, an almost yielding heart, to the voice that whispers to us—Cease to doubt, cease to dispute, cease to think. See this sign,—obey and rest?

But, on the other hand, there has always existed in the Church the opposite school of thought—that which

demands a demonstration, not to the senses, but to the intellect—which is, therefore, impatient of mystery, incredulous of the supernatural, rebellious against authority—which seeks ever to divest Christianity of all that is mysterious or supernatural and to reduce it, as much as possible, to a purely natural religion, to something that can be weighed and measured by the understanding, or that approves itself to the feelings; to something, in short, that is self-evident to the natural man. To this source may be traced all those heresies which may be described as *negative*, which consist in the denial of some of the supernatural facts, or the rejection of some of the mysteries of the Gospel. From the earliest days of Christianity to our own, the Catholic Church has had to contend with those who denied the great miracles of the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ and the Inspiration of Holy Writ, or sought to explain away the Great mysteries of Redemption and Atonement and Regeneration. All these denials of the supernatural, all these attempts at getting rid of the mysteries of the Christian faith, are but the efforts of the human mind to attain to absolute certainty, but which seeks to gain it in a demonstration, not of power for the senses, but of wisdom to the intellect.

At this moment we are suffering from a reaction in this direction. The age in which we live is intellectual, self-reliant, sceptical. The human intellect—resenting the long tyranny of tradition and authority in science and in philosophy—is insisting loudly upon its right to be the supreme and only judge of all questions. Religion is experiencing the effect of this revolt against authority. Men are demanding everywhere that religion, like philosophy or science, shall be received only so far as it can make good its claims at the bar of the intellect. As the

evidence of miracle was once held sufficient to prove any error, so the claim to such evidence is now held sufficient to discredit any truth. The mind of man is revenging itself for its long slavery to usurping superstition, by an attempt to overthrow the lawful authority of revelation. As men once demanded power without wisdom, so now they insist upon wisdom without power. They ask for a religion which shall be purely and entirely human, set forth in a revelation, not *to* man, but *of* and *by* man; a Bible which is not inspired; a Christ who is not incarnate; a Church which has no Divine and indwelling Spirit; a Gospel which tells us no truth which we could not have discovered for ourselves and reveals no wisdom which it did not first derive from us. This is that Gospel for the age, freed from all the errors of the past, the remains of Hebrew superstition, from which Jesus of Nazareth did so much to free religion in His day, but of which He left so much for us to free it from in our day. This is that Gospel of wisdom without power which the age demands, and with which so many are endeavouring to supply it.

To effect this all the resources of learning, all the ingenuity of criticism, are put forth. No hypothesis is too wild, no interpretation is too extravagant, no assertion is too bold, if only it disposes of a miracle, or dispenses with a mystery. Especially are these attacks directed against the story of the Gospel, that obstinate history of miracles, that record of a life which is all one miracle, which records in its every line the manifestation of a great power of God dwelling among men. For if this were once disposed of, it were easy to deal with all the rest of Scripture. Indeed, if this story of the life and death of Christ be not a true one, if Christ were not all that Christianity proclaims Him to be, the miracles and prophecies of the Old Testament, which were only the

announcements and foreshadowings of Him and of His kingdom, become utterly useless and unmeaning. And, on the other hand, if we accept the one great miracle of the Incarnation, there is no reason why we should reject the lesser miracles that precede or attend it. If we believe that Christ did, indeed, come down from heaven to reveal God to man, there is no difficulty in believing that God spake before from heaven to tell men that He was to come, or that signs and wonders should herald or accompany his appearance upon earth.

The Gospel history then, the life and character of Christ Himself, must be, is becoming more and more clearly, the ground on which the battle of Christianity with the scepticism of the age is to be fought out. The controversy is rapidly narrowing itself to this one issue,—“What think ye of Christ, whose son is He?” It is against this rock, the rock on which He built His Church, even the record of the life of a Christ who claims to be the Son of the Living God, that the wild waves of unbelief are rising ever higher and higher, dashing themselves ever more and more fiercely. Could they but once sweep over it, the light of the Word, the light that now shines out, the only beacon over the wild waves of human passion and human sin, were quenched for ever. For with that story vanishes all certain evidence of a power of God, working among men and in man, of a love of God, redeeming, seeking, saving man. With the Gospel vanishes the whole book of God, and with the book the God of the book, the living, personal God, the ruling, loving, Father of men. Nature would take the place of the God of Nature, and the idolatry of law be substituted for the worship of the lawgiver; until at last the seeker after wisdom end his search in the fool’s discovery that there is no greater, no diviner wisdom or power than his own, and stand at last

in the despair of hopeless atheism, in a world from which he had succeeded in banishing the sign that reveals and that alone fully reveals, the wisdom and the power of the God who made it.

My brethren, my reverend brethren, into the midst of this strife of contending principles, you are advancing to take your part. It has come to your turn to bring the Gospel to bear upon the wants and sorrows, the doubts and difficulties, of the age. And if I have spoken to you this day of those doubts and difficulties, rather than of the practical and every-day duties of a minister's life, it is because I am convinced that to encounter these difficulties, to meet these doubts, will be your practical, your most practical, duty wherever your lot be cast. Not only in the active intellectual life of the university or the theological college, not only in the retirement of our studies, but by the wayside and in the market-place, from the lips of the cultivated man of the world and of the ignorant peasant, in the simple questions of the little child, do these doubts haunt and waylay us. Everywhere, anywhere that we meet with man, we must expect to be called upon to hear and to answer the questions of the superstitious or the sceptical; for the questions they ask, the demands they make, are not of this, nor of any age, but of all ages. They are but the utterance of the desires, the expression of the needs, of our common human nature.

Woe to us if we cannot answer them! Woe to us if we can only listen in silent terror to the cry of those who feeling themselves drifting away from the old moorings out into a sea of doubt, ask us for help and counsel, and we have no help or counsel to give them.

What, then, should we do,—we who are called to preach Christ crucified, in an age of contending doubt and

superstition? In the first place, we should not be surprised nor dismayed at what we see. It is no new thing that we are contemplating. As it was in St. Paul's day so is it now, Christianity must still encounter the seeker for the sign and the seeker for wisdom. The Gospel of Christ crucified must always stand in irreconcilable antagonism alike to those who would harden it into a superstition, and to those who would dissolve it into a philosophy. The temple of which we are the guardians has always been endangered alike by those who would darken the light of the Word within it, as well as by those who would raze it even to the ground. And yet it stands still, as it has ever stood, resting upon that rock against which the gates of hell shall never prevail—"Christ Jesus, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." High on its summit, above the clouds and mists of human ignorance and unbelief, stands still revealed the sign of man's salvation, the cross of Christ; and still is the prophecy of Him who hung upon that cross fulfilled, that if He be lifted up all men should come unto Him. Nation after nation, age after age, have heard in their turn the joyful sound of those messengers of glad tidings who bid them look upon that cross and live. In every nation and in every age there have been those who saw in it but a stumbling-block or foolishness. But there have been, also, and shall ever be, those who, feeling that they need a Saviour and that it displays to them the only Saviour for their need, come humbly, come lovingly to its foot, and, kneeling down beneath its shadow, feel, as it falls upon them in all its healing and sanctifying influence, that Christ crucified is, indeed, "to them that are called, the wisdom and the power of God."

In the next place; as we have no reason to fear for the Gospel, so must we take heed that we are sternly faithful

